



CAPTivations

Success Stories in Prevention

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City of Longview Partners in Prevention (TX)

A few years ago, the Stamper Park neighborhood in Longview, Texas, was a neighborhood to avoid. Its main corner featured an old building where kids and young adults could find all kinds of drugs and prostitution.

Now, thanks to determined neighbors and help from the City of Longview's Partners in Prevention, a neighborhood community center sits on that corner, a place where kids can go for day programs, families can host reunions and birthday parties, and cities can hold meetings and recreational events.

The 180-degree turnaround of the Stamper Park neighborhood has become Partners in Prevention's model initiative, showing that with perseverance, the community can make positive changes that will result in stronger, healthier kids, said Dietrich Johnson, program manager.

"We want people to have empowerment, to be engaged, to support what they create," Johnson said.

Partners in Prevention began in 1989 when the Longview city council decided to address the issue of drug abuse prevention. Alice Day, the program manager at the time, applied for a demonstration grant from the federal Office of Substance Abuse and Prevention (now CSAP) for a community mobilization initiative, then called the Drug Task Force.

At the time, Johnson said, the focus was on drugs, with the nation declaring its war on drugs, but with the demonstration grant, the community discovered that a more comprehensive approach was needed.

Johnson notes that "It takes all segments to address the issue, and it's larger than a substance abuse issue." Addressing these risk factors also keeps them from other things, like violence, low commitment to school, sex, and so forth.

To reflect the commitment to a wider range of issues – and also to remove the association the name "Drug Task Force" has with law enforcement – the city changed the name to Partners in Prevention three years ago.

Partners in Prevention (PIP) has recruited more than 150 agencies, businesses, churches, and other organizations to help in the effort to build a strong, supportive community for children

to grow up in. PIP involved in a wide range of programs and activities, funded by local, state, and federal grants, as well as by individual and corporate donations. PIP develop neighborhoods, provide youth activities, and build bridges across racial divides, in this northeast Texas town of 75,000.

Stamper Park has been the crown jewel of PIP's neighborhood development initiative, but it has worked in other neighborhoods, as well. PIP works with Longview citizens to host National Night Out block parties, events that promote anti-crime efforts with neighbors banding together. Citizens keep their porch lights on, to let criminals know they are not welcome.

PIP also is involved in such efforts as Project Longview. Project Longview homeowners provide volunteer assistance in exterior painting and other home improvements. PIP also gathers, refurbishes, and distributes bicycles to children during the month of December. Other PIP

activities are conducting various neighborhood clean-up projects.

Mentoring has also been a major focus of PIP, and its program has three components. The first two are adult-youth mentoring projects: Forever Friends, which matches women with girls in grades four and up,

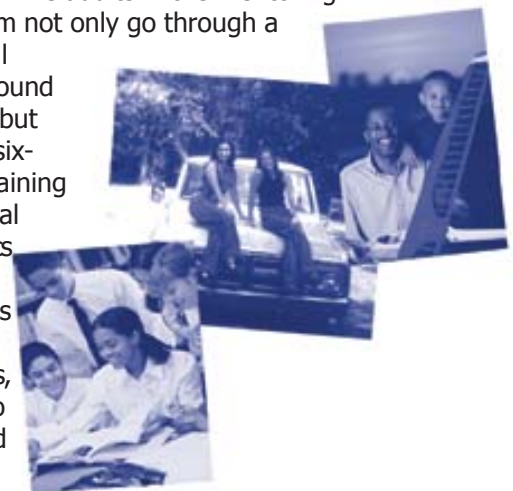
and Co-Pilots, which matches men with boys in grades four and up.

"We only ask for a one-year commitment," Johnson states, "but the adults want to maintain the relationships, so we haven't identified an age when the program ends."

The adults in the mentoring

program not only go through a criminal background check, but also a six-hour training on social dynamics which includes ice breakers, what to say and

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what not to say to the kids, interesting games and books to share with the kids, and other mentoring issues.

Partners in Prevention works with teachers and counselors in Longview's three school districts to choose which students will participate in the mentoring program. The selection process is left up to the schools, and it is not necessarily the "at risk" students who receive mentors.

The third component of the mentoring program matches high school students to elementary school students. High school juniors and seniors who are part of the Peer Assistance Leaders program, and are considered good role models, are matched with fifth grade students. Students meet one-on-one and they also work together to make crafts and provide treats and entertainment to local nursing homes during the holidays.

High school sophomores, meanwhile, get to become pen pals with area fourth grade students. Not only does this build a relationship between the two age groups, Johnson notes, but the teachers of both the fourth graders and the tenth graders report that the students' language skills improve because of the letter writing.

Another program for youth is the Camp Harvey summer enrichment program. Although it is not summer school, it is an extension of school, to let kids know it's okay to learn and be smart, Johnson comments. The camp serves some 50 3rd-5th graders six hours a day for five weeks, providing them with community service projects such as visiting nursing homes to play checkers, present gifts and fetch water; educational visits from firefighters, emergency medical technicians and other professionals; arts and crafts time; field trips to science centers, the zoo, and various industries, and of course education on the dangers of drug and alcohol and drug use.

The program gets a great deal of volunteer support, especially from college students, Johnson observes. For every two campers, three older people are

there to provide a loving presence.

Youth are not only served by various programs, but also get to serve in Partners in Prevention. The Youth Action Committee is made up of young members representing all segments of the community and speak out in an advisory capacity on what youth need. The action committee is involved on the underage drinking program, and recently painted a mural in the local mall, entitled "Reflections of Our Choices." Participants painted examples of the bad effects if they choose substance abuse, and the positive effects if they choose to stay away from alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Partners in Prevention works with Draw the Line, Longview, an underage drinking program which is sponsored under a different grant. Many of the program's activities are tied to the spring's twin events of prom and graduation, with volunteers – mostly mothers – working with schools to plan alternative parties for after prom and graduation that have no alcohol or other substances, Johnson points out.

Partners in Prevention also has a strong race relations component, by promoting dialog on several fronts. As Johnson put it, "If we can have a civil dialog on race relations, that is much better than having something happen that is reactive in the community."

One of the partnership's efforts has been in conjunction with the Longview Interfaith Council to sponsor an interfaith/ interracial church partnership. Twenty-six congregations formed 13 partnerships – in many cases pairings of predominantly white and predominantly black churches – that, among other things, shared joint worship services, participated in the annual Martin Luther King community service, worked in each other's Vacation Bible Schools, recognized "Undoing Racism Day," which Mayor Earl Roberts proclaimed as Sept. 20, 2001, and sponsored small groups to study racism.

In the future Partners in Prevention will work on an educational campaign to promote the 40 developmental assets as spelled out by the Search Institute. These assets, which can be provided by parents, teachers, ministers, or any caring adult, include support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

"It's a user-friendly way to get the prevention message across," Johnson comments. "It captures what prevention is."

The program gets a great deal of volunteer support, especially from college students

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Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
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Decision Support System
www.preventiondss.org

Join Together
www.jointogther.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America
www.cadca.org

"For this community success story and others from across the Southwest region, visit our website at <http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html>

